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Gallery and Studio

A MILLET EXHIBITION IN PARIS.



PORTRAIT OF JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET.

AN exhibition of paintings, pastels and drawings by J. F. Millet was opened at the École des Beaux Arts in May with all the éclat of the patronage of the State, of the Institute and of contemporary art. It was intended, we were told, to be at once a rehabilitation and an apotheosis of the painter who was a victim of the injustice of the Jury of the Salon in former days, and

who was happy to sell for \$600 that famous "Angelus" which now cannot be bought for \$100,000. Unfortunately the exhibition has provoked among the general public in Paris more talk about dollars than about art, and there is little exaggeration in saying that the great attraction of the show is not the presence there of M. Secretan's "Angelus," or of M. Van Praet's "Shepherdess," or of M. Bischoffsheim's "Women Gleaning;" it is the fact that three pictures are on exhibition for which "les Yankées" have vainly offered six-figure prices varying between three and five hundred thousand francs; it is the fact that speculators have made enormous sums by trading with these works; it is the fact announced by the newspapers that the Americans are ready to buy by cable any day the whole lot of 250 pictures, pastels and drawings at the insurance estimation of \$800,000.

But enough of figures. What is the impression conveyed by this exhibition? Laying aside prejudice, accepted appreciations and current commonplace judgments about Millet, how does this collection of his work strike a contemporary? Heretical as the opinion may seem, I cannot help maintaining that Millet was a very poor painter, and that the juries of former days, whose duty it was to pay attention to execution, had often good reason to refuse his work. His pictures are good in spite of their execution, which is generally coarse, brutal, hesitating and monotonous. You may take any of the famous pictures exhibited at the École des Beaux-Arts, the "Angelus," the "Shepherdess," the "Peasants Killing a Pig," the "Lessiveuse," "La Becquéc," "Les Glaneuses," and in each and all you will observe the same woolly "facture" which makes no difference in the apparent texture of a cotton apron, a stuff dress, corduroy trousers or the wall of a house, but represents all these objects as having a woolly surface. When you see one picture from time to time treated in this manner, you pay no particular attention, because the mind is attracted by other qualities, but when you see a hundred canvases of great variety of subject all handled in the same rough manner you conclude that the artist is not a great painter in the sense that Velasquez, Titian and Veronese were great painters. Indeed, the more I examine the works exhibited at the École des Beaux Arts, which cover the whole period of Millet's life, and include much of his best effort, the more I feel that color helped him very little in the expression of his thought, and that by means of black and white he was able to present completely his ideas and his sentiments. What Millet has given us is the drama of rural life, with its gestures, its attitudes and its actions noted exactly, reduced to their simplest expression, and idealized in so far as the vision of the artist inclined him to see the peasants of Barbizon in the light of ministers performing, as it were, the sacred rites of nature, and, therefore, always instinct with a certain dignity, solemnity and melancholy. But all this Millet was able to express in his wonderful black

and white drawings, and in his succinct and exquisite etchings. Furthermore, now that I have seen the "Angelus" many times within the past five years, since it was sold in 1881, and now that I have been able to contemplate it at leisure at this present exhibition, I do not find that the painted picture contains a profounder sentiment or a more powerful charm, I do not only say than the drawing of the picture in the collection of Mr. W. T. Walters but also than the fine reproduction by Waltner which has helped to make the work so popular. Millet's oil-painting has in an infinitesimally small degree the direct physical charm of color and form. His strength lies in his broad, symbolic, and somewhat Michael-Angelesque drawing of the grandiose silhouettes of the sons of the soil in whom he always sees those fallen creatures of whom the Bible speaks, and who are condemned forever to earn their bread painfully by the sweat of their brow. Millet, in short, is great as a thinker and a poet rather than as a painter in the absolute sense of the term. And perhaps posterity, with that finer photometric vision which the study of the phenomena of light is gradually giving to our painters, will finally place the pastels of Millet above his oil-paintings, for the reason that in them Millet speaks more directly, and untrammelled by souvenirs of schools or of methods which he never thoroughly mastered. His pastels are neither like the pastels of Latour nor yet do they resemble the wonderful luminous work of modern men like Cazin, Gilbert or Besnard: they are simply drawings in black and white more or less heightened by touches of pastel. In some, the figures are left in black and white, and the landscape alone is touched with color; in very few is the whole subject treated entirely in color. In the pastels the color adds a certain physical charm which is often of very exquisite quality; but more often it merely adds some information as to the color of a dress or the tone of a sky. Rarely if ever was Millet conscious of the absolute charm of light and of the color which light creates, of the gayety or melancholy of light, of what may be called the dramatic qualities of light. In his work man predominates, and in man, gesture in the broadest sense; Millet is the painter of the rural drama, or rather he is a thinker and a poet who uses drawing heightened by color as a means of expressing his thoughts and his sentiments. This present exhibition is not likely to augment the glory of Millet, but rather to enable us to grasp his complete nature, to set forth his characteristics, and to give him his place among the classics of art.

THEODORE CHILD.

THE ROYAL ACADEMY EXHIBITION.

THERE can be little doubt this year at the Royal Academy of the success of that most worthy American representative, John L. Sargent. His marvellously clever and strangely-named picture, "Carnation-Lily, Lily-Rose," ever since "varnishing day" was the talk of all the studios, as it is now the talk of the town, for it has been bought for the Academy out of the Chantrey Bequest Fund—an exceptional honor for Burlington House to confer upon a foreigner. John Bull in London would really seem to be growing liberal. Whistler, a Yankee (albeit from Baltimore), President of its British Society of Water-Color Artists, and now Sargent, the recipient of Chantrey honors; Edwin A. Abbey, eulogized at a public banquet by Sir John Millais, and Mark Fisher, W. J. Hennessey, George H. Boughton, Arthur Parton, W. C. Mitchell and Eugene Benson always to be found among the most valued contributors to the exhibitions of the Academy and the Grosvenor. The American artist colony is certainly doing well.

But this is discursive. Let me return to Mr. Sargent. "Carnation-Lily, Lily-Rose" shows two beautiful, white-robed little girls in a garden, amid roses, tiger-lilies and carnations; it is just about that mysterious time of evening when the last rays of the sun have disappeared, and figures stand out with unusual distinctness in the soft summer air. The children, who are no taller than some of the lilies, are handling large Chinese lanterns, already

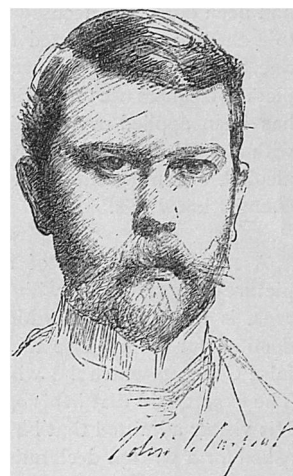
lighted, which throw many-colored reflections upon their faces and the flowers. There is the green lawn of the garden for a background. Enough has been said to indicate the daringness of Mr. Sargent's experiment with light and color. From the description would one not suppose that the result would be to sacrifice the portraits? No sacrifice of the kind is involved. The little girls are charmingly painted, and the charm is enhanced rather than diminished by the accessories.

Mr. Sargent contributes also one of the most effective portraits in the Royal Academy, that of the wife of Dr. Playfair, an imposing-looking lady in an evening dress of cream satin, trimmed with pearls, with a dark green opera-cloak thrown over her shoulders—all set off strikingly against a dark red background.

Alma-Tadema continues to hold the general public by pictures of a very different order than those of Mr. Sargent. He has lost none of his skill in representing textures; and his marble, for which, perhaps, the average Londoner holds him in the highest esteem, is as marvellously well-painted as ever. No picture from his brush is to be expected which does not introduce it, and a good deal of it. In "The Women of Amphisia" generous opportunities are afforded, in the market-place and adjacent temple. The canvas illustrates the story that after the taking of Delphi by the Phocians, the Chyades, women sacred to Dionysos, wandered into the city of Amphisia, which was in league with Phocis, and, overcome by fatigue, lay down to rest in the market-place, where at early morning they were discovered by their rivals, who tenderly watched over them until they awoke, and then fed them and escorted them back to their own territory. The marble is contrasted by the warm colors of fruits and vegetables and the bright sunlight which suffuses the scene. There is admirable drawing in the sleeping figures, and particularly in that of the graceful, golden-haired creature in the foreground. Alma-Tadema sold the picture for six thousand guineas before he sent it to the Academy.

The most ardent admirers of Sir John Millais can say little in his praise this season. It is certainly unfortunate for his reputation that he should have invited comparison with the work of his best period, when he painted the "Huguenot," by producing now the worse than commonplace pendant to it called "St. Bartholomew's — Mercy." A Catholic nobleman is being beckoned on by a theatrical-looking monk, while a nun is urging him to stay. Each figure seems to have been painted without reference to either of the others. The picture is wholly lacking in force or sentiment. Sir John's less pretentious canvas of a lady in yellow holding up a little girl to see the inmates of a bird's nest reminds one much more of his old work. He is at his best in painting children, and he has caught here with much success the half-curious, half-serious expression of the little girl. He has another picture of a bright-eyed, sunny-haired little maid, in a white dress tied with a rose-colored sash, holding up her apron to catch lilacs which some one is throwing to her.

Edwin Long sends "Calista, the Image Maker" modelling from clay a wretched little child who is posing as "Cupid," and "A Love Feast," presumably a scene of ancient Rome, with his usual array of bloodless, boneless, and utterly expressionless young women. He has also two portraits, but neither of them helps his reputation. Mr. Long is a weak imitator of Sir Frederick Leighton, but cannot stand comparison for one moment



PORTRAIT OF J. L. SARGENT, DRAWN BY HIMSELF.